

# **HOME BODY**

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Master of Fine Arts  
In the Department of Art and Art History  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

By

William Lee

### **Permission to Use**

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis. Requests for permission to copy or to make other use of material in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of Art & Art History  
Murray Building, University of Saskatchewan  
3 Campus Drive  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
S7N 5A4  
Canada

OR

Dean  
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
116 Thorvaldson Building, 110 Science Place  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5C9  
Canada



## Table of Contents

Permission to Use	i
Table of Contents	ii
List of Images	iii
Exhibition Statement	1
Bibliography	30

## List of Images

- Figure 1      *Image of doorway 1*, 2015. Digital photograph.
- Figure 2      *Image of doorway 2*, 2015. Digital photograph.
- Figure 3      William Lee, *Crossed Doorway & Remnants*, 2015. Found objects.
- Figure 4      William Lee, *Crossed Doorway & Remnants*, 2015. Found objects.
- Figure 5      William Lee, *Carpet Impressions*, 2018-19. Found objects.
- Figure 6      William Lee, *Carpet Impressions (detail)*, 2018-19. Found objects.
- Figure 7      Satellite image of house, 2019. Digital photograph.
- Figure 8      William Lee, *Removing the wallpaper*, 2019. Video still.
- Figure 9      William Lee *Removing the wallpaper*, 2019. Video still.
- Figure 10      *23andme ancestry info*, 2018. Digital photograph.
- Figure 11      *Screenshot of half-siblings*, 2018. Digital photograph.
- Figure 12      William Lee, *Behind the Wallpaper*, 2019. Found wallpaper, MDF, paint.
- Figure 13      William Lee, *Behind the Wallpaper (detail)*, 2019. Found wallpaper, MDF, paint.
- Figure 14      William Lee, *Accumulated Wallpaper Cuttings*, 2019. Found wallpaper, glass.
- Figure 15      Figure 15: William Lee, *Accumulated Wallpaper Cuttings (detail)*, 2019. Found wallpaper, glass.
- Figure 16      William Lee, *3 names*, 2019. Found objects, MDF, paint.
- Figure 17      William Lee, *3 names (detail)*, 2019. Found objects, MDF, paint.
- Figure 18      William Lee, *3 names (detail)*, 2019. Found objects, MDF, paint.
- Figure 19      William Lee, *3 names (detail)*, 2019. Found objects, MDF, paint.
- Figure 20      *Half-siblings in Minnesota*, 2019. Digital photograph.
- Figure 21      William Lee, *Installation View 1*, 2019. Found wallpaper, MDF, paint, video projection.
- Figure 22      William Lee, *Installation View 2*, 2019. Found wallpaper, glass, video projection.

Prologue: 2007-2010

*The salt lake is small, but far deeper than one would expect. As you step into the water, the bottom quickly descends, and you might find yourself floating. The only things that can live in the water are very small crustaceans called brine shrimp—they thrive in the high salt content, with a limited number of predators. In the fall, the water turns dark from the density of their eggs saturating the water. The waves peak with white foam that collects along the edges of the beaches and the smell of it prickles the nose with the tang of sulphur. Sometimes when the temperature drops the salt collects along the beach and locals harvest it to use in homemade salves or to dissolve it in their bath water. People also collect the mud from the bottom of the lake and spread it on their faces as a health-promoting mask.*

*My mother and I moved to Manitou Beach, an hour's drive from Saskatoon, when I turned 15 after my parents divorced two years earlier. The house was situated on a cliff next to the lake, and there was a stone staircase that led down and into the water. I spent many nights sitting on those stone steps with my feet dipped in the water, watching the stars and their reflections. There is no light pollution from the small resort community, so the sky is clear, and the northern lights are spectacular. Manitou Beach always gave me a strange feeling, especially at night when I was alone in silence with nature. It always felt special there, and locals and visitors noted they felt something similar, but no one could ever quite figure out what it was. Many people believe the waters have healing properties.*

*My mother had just married a man named Eric. He was passionate about bidding on unusual objects from antique auctions and then trying to re-sell them for a profit. He owned a shop attached to the house where I worked every day in the summer. I'd spend most of my time*

*rearranging the displays. Sometimes I would group things together on shelves based on their colors, reds or blues or greens, for example, or items made of ceramic or glass. Near the entrance to the shop there was a large plexiglass shelving unit with many individual openings. I liked to rearrange it regularly and think about how visitors would be drawn to it, curious to see the things I had chosen to display.*

January 2015

I woke up at 6:00 a.m., totally confused by the sounds I heard. My heart was beating hard; I felt panicked and disoriented. I heard unfamiliar voices outside the bedroom door and many heavy footsteps against the floor. Someone had broken into my basement suite. I bolted upright and grabbed my phone to call 9-1-1. My boyfriend, Graham, was next to me, equally bewildered by what was happening.

The voices outside our bedroom door sounded authoritative. Perhaps the police had arrived in response to my call? It sounded like they were inspecting things.

“This room is clear!”

“Try the next.”

Our bedroom door swung open and a beam of light shone directly on us. A man entered, holding a flashlight. He told us to get up and to hold our hands out. He made sure we weren't carrying anything and escorted us into our living room. Shockingly, there stood at least ten police heavily armed with assault rifles. Graham and I were naked.

Despite our extreme vulnerability, I felt calm. I knew we hadn't done anything wrong. I knew everything was going to be okay. I could sense discomfort among the group of cops that surrounded us. One of the officers found our robes from the bedroom and brought them to us although, even after putting on my robe, I still felt naked.

A police officer instructed Graham to sit on the couch and made me sit in my office chair in the corner. This was the chair I sat in most of the time in our tiny basement suite where I worked at digital art projects on my computer. An officer was stationed next to each of us, making sure we didn't move.

They started questioning us about who we were. We showed them identification.

They asked us, "Do you know Armand Hounjet?"

We did. He was the tenant that rented our upstairs unit.

We never suspected anything wrong upstairs. We knew he had guns though. And we often saw unfamiliar vehicles parked around the house, but never questioned it.

The cops left us to continue investigating the main floor upstairs. They had broken through that door, too. Assuming I was free to move from my chair, I walked to the entrance to look at the damage.



Figure 1: *Image of doorway 1, 2015.*  
Digital photograph.



Figure 2: *Image of doorway 2, 2015.*  
Digital photograph.

Our house had two broken doors. Each door was split: handle, locks, casing and drywall damaged. They couldn't be closed. It was the middle of winter; we were left alone in the cold when the police departed.

Hounjet wasn't even home upstairs. The police hadn't told us anything. They said it was big, and that we'd hear about it in the news.

It was strange seeing this event in the news with many people commenting on social media about something that had just happened in our home. I was glad they didn't show our house in the news, but they showed others. It turned out many houses had been raided, at the exact same time across Saskatchewan and Alberta. Fourteen people were arrested on 61 charges: drug and weapon trafficking, assault, and other offences. Drugs included methamphetamine, cocaine, fentanyl and heroin. Over 200 weapons, thousands of rounds of ammunition and four ballistic vests were also seized.

This was all in the news. At home, we felt damaged and vulnerable. It was as if a threshold had been crossed. It felt like anyone could break into our house at any time. Any day, absolutely anything can happen, when you're least expecting it and your life can be altered.



Figure 3: William Lee, *Crossed Doorway & Remnants*, 2015. Found objects.



Figure 4: William Lee, *Crossed Doorway & Remnants*, 2015. Found objects.



After this disturbing raid of our house and the repairs we had to make, I collected the door frame and remnant objects from the event. For a class project, I balanced the doorframe out in the middle of the gallery space, allowing the viewer to walk through. I placed remnant objects from the event on a shelf behind the door frame: notably the doorbell, screws and the dented door knob. By using these objects to make art, I was able to reflect on the experience and share the story. It helped me to process it all. I was in a senior sculpture class at the time, and much of my work used a minimalist, formal vocabulary of materials. When I showed this piece in class I was still uncertain how much to reveal, how much to conceal. I was interested to hear how my classmates might interpret this work without knowing the story. I think art is one of the best ways to deal with memories, in a physical manner and I am interested in contemporary art that deals with emotional and psychological states.

Cornelia Parker's work, "Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View," for example, evokes a similar emotional response. Parker purchased an ordinary garden shed and filled it with domestic objects. The shed was then blown up in a field by the British School of Ammunition. All the parts of the shed were collected together, reassembled, and suspended from the gallery ceiling with wires. While my work differs from Parker's piece – the "explosion that occurred in my work was not intentional" – both works draw the viewer into the aftermath of violent events.

September 2018

I began the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of Saskatchewan in the fall of 2018, after completing my Bachelor of Fine Arts the previous spring. I had also just moved back into my childhood home in Saskatoon with my new partner, Russell. It was good to leave behind the bashed-in basement suite and memories of the break in. The house I grew up in had been had been rented for over a decade since my mother and I moved to Manitou Beach, but there was still evidence of our life there. It was comforting that I was able to have this as my home but somewhat disturbing that other people had been living there for a decade. To give ourselves a greater sense of ease in the house, we decided to do some renovations. The first thing we decided to do was to remove the living room carpet which was old and distressed. I also noticed how there were still imprints left in the carpet from the family furniture that had always been there while I was growing up. I had learned to crawl on that carpet.

The night before the carpet was to be removed, I decided to save those sections that contained the imprints of our old furniture. I was in a hurry to remove them, so I used a utility knife to cut through the carpet. It was difficult to penetrate the fabric with the blade, and I had to pass the knife through the thick fibres many times until it would cut. My sense of urgency and the sheer physical labor resulted in rough, irregular edges.

Like the remnants of the basement suite doors from the previous house, the pieces of carpet carried a strong emotional resonance for me. Could I use them in my artwork? I hung them up on my studio walls like minimal, Modernist paintings, with slight variations in color and texture. Splats of paint marred the surface as did years of grime from dirty feet and shoes. We don't normally see carpet on the walls, so I also felt it would draw the viewer in to observe

them more closely. The pieces of old, worn carpet were reminiscent of the process land art of American minimalists, Michael Heizer and Richard Serra.

While the carpets on their own can be seen as like both paintings and landscapes, they had such strong personal memories that I wanted to add old family photographs (from the thousands I had in boxes). In response to feedback that the photos were too obvious and somewhat confusing when used like “labels” beside the hanging carpets, I hid them behind with a small edge peeking out. Still I wondered: should they be present at all? How much, again, do I want to reveal? How much to conceal?



Figure 5: William Lee, *Carpet Impressions*, 2018-19. Found objects.



Figure 6: William Lee, *Carpet Impressions (detail)*, 2018-19. Found objects.

Robert Therrien made an artwork, *Under the Table*, that related to his childhood. He took hundreds of photos from the undersides of his own kitchen table and chairs, and then he made a sculpture that doubled the scale of the original. The viewer's head only reaches the height of the chair seats. This evokes an emotional response from the viewer, as a reminder of their childhood memories. Unlike Therrien, I am using the objects from my own childhood and not altering scale, though I am similarly interested in evoking memories in the viewer.

Upon moving back into my childhood home, 115 Baldwin Crescent, I noticed the hedge in the backyard no longer existed. It has been replaced by a line of elm trees. There is a peony plant by the fence that had always been there, but the shade from the new trees prevents it



from blooming. This house is located in the mature suburban neighbourhood of Brevoort Park and is where I spent the first 15 years of my life. Every room I enter in this house unlocks layers and layers of memories.



Figure 7: *Satellite image of house, 2019.* Digital photograph.

I sleep in the room where my parents slept twenty years ago. I didn't like staying in that room at first, but I've warmed up to it. Some parts of the house remind me too much of my childhood, and not always in the best ways. The bedroom felt better after I rolled a few layers of paint onto the walls.

I have had trouble with anxiety since I was a kid. My parents normalized it and called it "being over-excited". I often had to miss school field trips because I would get sick from being too nervous. I always felt like I wasn't as smart as everyone else. I almost failed some classes in high school because I stopped handing in my assignments even though they were completed. I felt too self-conscious to let anyone read them. My feelings of inadequacy were self-fulfilled.

Although I was now enrolled in graduate school and had completed a BFA, I never felt like I belonged in university. I felt like an imposter since neither of my parents had completed university education. During my childhood, my mom had Crohn's disease and she was home on sick-leave most of the time. I never had a good relationship with my dad and I've not communicated with him since the divorce, even though we live in the same city. He grew up with nine siblings in Ontario, but I've never met that side of the family. I'm not sure if they know I exist. My mom used to compare me to my dad a lot—she hoped I wouldn't turn out like him. I think I internalised those thoughts. I didn't want to grow up be like my dad.

In 2011, my mom passed away when I was 19. I was an only child and often felt very alone. After her death, I started going to therapy with the intention of learning how to fix my social anxiety. It had been a problem for me for a long time, and I had never sought help for it. The therapist brought out some books with lists of symptoms and illustrations. None of it was clicking with me. The methods they gave made sense, but it just didn't feel like a solution to the problems I was experiencing. It felt like something deeper, more hidden.

The house I grew up in and now live in is a bungalow. There's a rec room in the basement that I now use as a studio space. I go and up and down the staircase many times a day, and I began to notice the flowered wallpaper in the stairwell. It was several decades old, just like the carpet, and covered with a repeating floral pattern. I imagined renovating this as well. I started to strip away the old wallpaper. After I'd scraped and torn away one panel, I stopped. Might this wallpaper also be worth preserving, a remnant of my past in this house? I started to take more care as I removed it, using a wet rag to moisten the glue. I used a scraper

to gently lift it away from the wall. I noticed how it came off the wall like a skin. It felt like there were secrets that could only be found in the walls.

I felt that the process of removing the wallpaper was important to document as well. I set up my tripod and let my video camera record as I removed one panel of wallpaper. When I documented this, I wanted it to be as natural as possible, so I wore clothes that I would normally wear while I work in my basement studio: gym shorts and a t-shirt. While editing this footage I chose to loop the 8-minute video after I walk out of the frame, to reveal the process of removing the panel again and again.



Figure 8: William Lee, *Removing the wallpaper*, 2019. Video still.



Figure 9: William Lee *Removing the wallpaper*, 2019. Video still.

November 2018

When I don't have structure in my day-to-day life my sleep schedule turns progressively upside-down. Carefully removing the wallpaper day after day provided a daily routine.

Nevertheless, I was up late one night, on my laptop, scrolling through Facebook and saw an ad for *23andme*, an at-home DNA test kit purporting to trace one's ancestry. Given my absence of connection to my dad's extended family, I had come close to purchasing the kit before as I was interested to see if I could find out more about that side of my ancestry, but I could never justify the cost. It was a novelty. There were other things I needed more urgently.

But it was Black Friday: on sale. I added the kit to my cart, as if to purchase it. I had some extra cash. I impulsively hit the checkout button then felt a tinge of regret for spending my money on that. But I had finally done it! It gave me something to look forward to and that was nice to have during a period when I was feeling lost in my anxieties.

A few weeks later I received a small white box in the mail—the *23andme* kit. It required a sample of saliva, so I spit into the tube until it reached the fill-line, packed it all back into the box, and sent it back to the lab.

All this time I had been continuing with therapy, continuing to discuss methods of coping with my social anxiety. I really wanted to change myself. I felt really tired of not having confidence in myself. It felt like something was wrong, but I couldn't figure it out. I wanted to live a fuller life.

Two weeks passed. I was up late again: 12:30am, December 24, Christmas eve. I received a notification on my phone. My *23andme* results were available on-line. I hesitated. I had a feeling I wouldn't sleep that night if I saw my results. It was Christmas Eve and I was going



to see my maternal grandmother and extended family the next day and I wanted to make sure I had enough sleep. I decided to wait until morning.

When I awoke, I brought my laptop back to the bedroom to look over my *23andme* results with my partner, Russell. I opened it up and went through my ancestry results. It was nothing unexpected—mostly British & Irish, some Scandinavian. My maternal grandma had told me her mother was Jewish, so I was happy to see this confirmed in my results.

“Was it worth the money?” Russell asked.

I just laughed. At least it put my curiosity to rest. There were other pages I hadn’t looked at including one that connects with any DNA relatives who may have also taken the test. I clicked on that page thinking I might find some of the Ontario relatives I’d never met or who might not know of my existence.

There was a list of profiles, labelled with names and relations, with the closest matches at the top of the list. I was expecting to possibly see some cousins or aunts and uncles.

But that’s not what I saw. The top four profiles were labelled as half siblings, which didn’t make sense. I started looking through their profiles—one from Vermont, one from Minnesota, another from Wisconsin, and one from Ontario. I thought there must be a mistake,

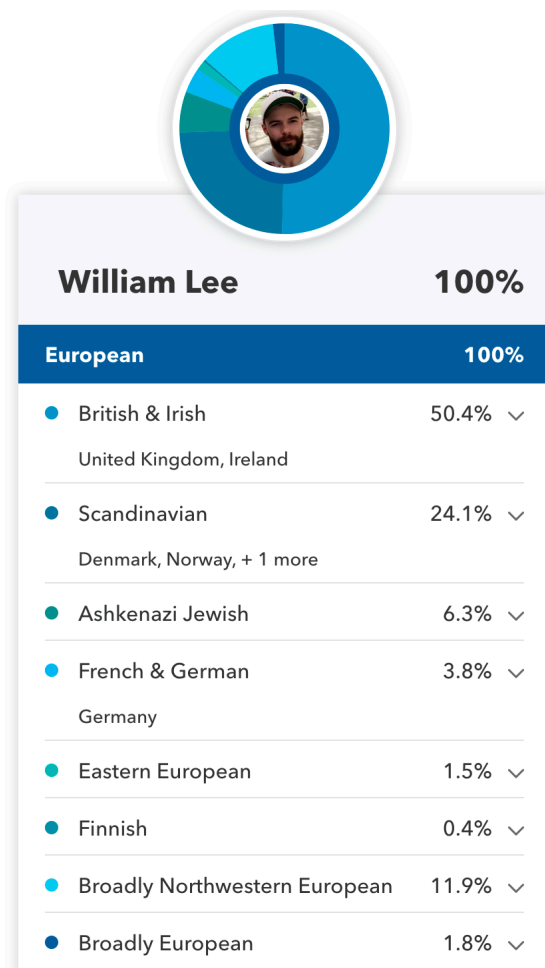


Figure 10: *23andme ancestry info*, 2018. Digital photograph.

or that they were all fake profiles. I disregarded it—closed it and went to my Christmas family dinner.





★	Name	Relationship	Sharing
☆ 	<b>Daniel Dennis</b> Male	Half Brother 23.1% DNA shared, 40 segments	●
☆ 	<b>Zachary Flint</b> Male	Half Brother 21.8% DNA shared, 39 segments	●
☆ 	<b>Jenna Burgess</b> Female	Half Sister 25.6% DNA shared, 38 segments	●
☆ 	<b>Alanna Kelly</b> Female	Half Sister 18.5% DNA shared, 35 segments	●

Figure 11: Screenshot of half-siblings, 2018. Digital photograph.

But I couldn't stop thinking about it. I had to figure this out. After the dinner, I went back to the profiles of these "half-siblings" and I sent all four of them the same message: "Hey, I just got my results back on here and we matched as half-siblings. Do you think this stuff is accurate?"

I had no expectations. I had no idea if anyone would respond, or if they were even real people. I started researching to see if anyone else had received inaccurate matches. I found others who had written about being matched with unexpected people, but it wasn't inaccuracy.

The first "half-sibling" responded quickly. His name was Daniel (the one from Wisconsin), and he wrote me: "Yes, I just found out yesterday so it's new to me too. And I've been in contact with the others. Do you know that you're the result of artificial insemination? This may be kind of a surprise... "

It was a surprise: I was shocked. I didn't know how to absorb this startling information. My identity, my sense of who I am, was totally confused and I had no one to turn to with my questions. I wanted something repetitive to focus on. I spent hours pacing in my basement, repeating the same circles of thoughts over and over. It felt like my brain was reprogramming itself. I'm not related to my dad—my real dad is someone totally different. I'm not who I thought I was. But then, "Who am I?"



Figure 12: William Lee, *Behind the Wallpaper*, 2019. Found wallpaper, MDF, paint.





Figure 13: William Lee, *Behind the Wallpaper (detail)*, 2019. Found wallpaper, MDF, paint.

I continued the slow and careful process of removing the wallpaper from the stairwell shortly after learning I was donor conceived and continued as I learned more. I started cutting out the flower patterns using an x-acto knife. Working on this took days, weeks and finally a few months as I processed what had happened. Removing the illustrations of bits of petals and stems, was a sort of meditative, interior process of realigning my own history and identity. The paper tears easily so I had to be very careful while cutting the pattern. I liked the contrast between the clean cuts and the rough tears.

As I was cutting away small bits of petals and leaf patterns from the paper, I started collecting them in a plastic sandwich bag. The bag slowly filled up as the hours and hours of labor and time passed. The clear bag, slowly being filled, reminded me of an hourglass. Though, unlike an hour glass, this bag took months to fill.



Figure 14: William Lee, *Accumulated Wallpaper Cuttings*, 2019. Found wallpaper, glass.





Figure 15: William Lee, *Accumulated Wallpaper Cuttings (detail)*, 2019. Found wallpaper, glass.

June 7, 2019

I had never travelled alone before. Airports make me anxious. I packed a carry-on bag to last me six nights. I was heading to Thunder Bay, Ontario to meet my half-siblings: Alanna (who lives in Thunder Bay), Jenna (from Florida) and Zach (Boston). We had all decided to meet up and drive to Minnesota together.

After finding these half-siblings through *23andme*, we started a group chat on Facebook. I learned there weren't just four siblings: there were ten. Although Daniel knew he was donor-conceived (his parents had told him when he was young), he had found out about all of these siblings just one day before me. We had both been seduced by the Black Friday sale! The other siblings had been similarly shocked to discover there were more half-siblings, some of whom

had traced their DNA through another DNA testing site, *ancestry.com* (where one of them also linked to the donor). We all decided to meet.

I had no idea what to expect from this experience, and I was anxious. I knew this was going to have a big impact on me. As I walked along the ramp and onto that plane, I felt like I was leaving an old life behind me. It was unsettling for Russell who noticed, for example, that I'd packed my gaming computer away. I didn't want to spend my time on it anymore. I read that it's the things we spend time on every day that make us who we are. I'd wanted to change myself through therapy and it seemed that now, with the DNA test, things were changing beyond my control.

I sat in my seat on the plane, watching the flight attendants close all the overhead compartments. The woman next to me preferred the aisle seat so we traded. I was glad to have the window to gaze out of and I let my mind wander as the plane took off.

Finding out that the dad I grew up with wasn't related to me at all took a huge weight off me. It freed me from comparing myself to him. I've always been a visual, design-oriented person, but I always felt doubt in my abilities and I was not at all like my father who worked as a care aid. When I discovered that my biological father is an architect, I felt validated by this new information—it made me feel as if I am capable of doing the things I do.

I had sent an email to my social father (I now understood this as the term used for the father I grew up with) a few weeks before the trip. I wanted to get more answers from him before meeting my biological father. He explained that he had had fertility issues. I had carefully asked him if he knew why I was never told of the donor conception. He blamed my mother, as he expected she would have told me after the divorce. He blamed me for not being

in contact with him for so long. It's fair—I hadn't spoken to him since I was 15. I'll never know why my mother didn't tell me. She must have felt it was best that way. It would have been hard for her to explain it to her family. I speculate that my parents must have convinced themselves that the donor conception had never happened. In the past, this was often recommended, as psychiatrist, Philip Bloom, wrote: "For the [donor offspring] child's sake particularly I prefer that absolutely nobody but the parents themselves should know of the [donor] insemination therapy. My last advice to the parents is that under no circumstances should they, or need they, ever tell the child the method of conception—in fact they should forget about it themselves."<sup>1</sup> (1957). Although this advice was offered decades before my own conception, it still seems to have been the attitude of my parents in 1992, the year I was born. My parents had me fully convinced that I was biologically theirs, and I never questioned it. Even though I was much taller than both my parents, they linked my height to my social father's side of the family. He had tall brothers. But now that I know the truth, who I am makes so much more sense.

What if I had never taken that DNA test? What if I had never found out? I read a study about how parents have trouble telling their child about the donor conception. They may want to wait until the child is old enough to understand but then the older the child gets, the more difficult it is to tell them. The parent is afraid of the child's reaction. They fear their child will lose trust in them and be upset with them.

I think I always knew something wasn't right, but I would have never suspected this to be it. I thought I knew everything about myself.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bloom, P. (1957) Artificial insemination (donor). *The Eugenics Review*, January, 48, 205–207.



Sometimes I'll just open the *23andme* relatives page and stare at the screen with the photos of my half-siblings, reminding myself that it's real. I've been emailing my biological father. His name is Brad. His writing is introspective and caring and I sense his depth and understanding. He's enthusiastic to meet us. I've seen photos of him on his family's Facebook pages. As a child, my last name was Potter, which is a name that came from my social father. After moving back into the house on Baldwin Crescent, I found a door knocker still on the front door, marked with the engraving, "Potter". My parents had received this as a wedding gift. After my parents divorced, I chose to change my last name to my mother's maiden name, Lee. My grandpa (my mother's father) was a notary public and oversaw the name-change in their own home. When I visited their house recently, I found a stamp, labelled "Lee," in the same room where my name was changed. It is a stamp that produces an imprint of the name into the paper. After learning of my biological father's existence, I found his last name is Gray, which is my true paternal lineage. In my exhibition, I display each of the objects on a series of three separate square, gray shelves in a linear order from left to right, connecting to my identity as it was altered over time. I had been struggling to find an object that fit with the name "Gray", as this was a new name to me. For the first week of the installation of my show, I left the third shelf empty. Halfway through the show, I lightly scratched away the paint on the center surface of the shelf. I think the empty shelf suggested an absence, as if something were to be added at a later time.



Figure 16: William Lee, *3 names*, 2019. Found objects, MDF, paint.



Figure 17: William Lee, *3 names (detail)*, 2019. Found objects, MDF, paint.





Figure 18: William Lee, *3 names (detail)*, 2019. Found objects, MDF, paint.



Figure 19: William Lee, *3 names (detail)*, 2019. Found objects, MDF, paint.

As soon as my plane landed in Thunder Bay, Ontario I sent a text to Alanna. She was waiting outside with Zach and Jenna. I paused for a moment to take a deep breath. I knew that when I stepped outside everything would change and that this was my last moment of not knowing. A wave of bravery swept over me and I picked up my bag and walked through the automatic doors.

I could only see taxis and a crowd of strangers. Would I recognize these people I'd never met except on Facebook? Then their faces emerged from the crowd: Zach, smiling and waving, Jenna a short distance behind him and Alana coming to greet me.

The next day the group of us drove to Minnesota to meet with the rest of our half-siblings and biological father and spend a few days together at a cottage. I quickly noticed how some of my siblings reminded me of friends I've had in the past, or people I've had in my life. I felt like I already knew how to interact with them. Others noticed familiarity as well—we reminded them of other family members. We were siblings and strangers at the same time.

We played board games and activities that families would do at a cottage. I noticed how everyone was quite focused; things might get tense but would always end with laughter. Everyone was very collaborative and there was a high degree of ease and comfort with each other. I discovered seven of us were either working on a graduate degree or had completed one. This really struck me because I grew up in a family without education, where I'd felt like an outsider. But, with all these new siblings I fit in. It felt remarkably like family—not just DNA relatives. In a time when I felt so alone and unsure, I found family. It shows that absolutely anything can happen in life, anything is possible, both devastation and hope.





Figure 20: *Half-siblings in Minnesota*, 2019. Digital photograph.

Jenna Burgess, Alanna Kelly, Rachel Larson, Mary Larson, Andrew Gray, Beau Gray, Daniel Dennis, William Lee, Auric Nova, Zachary Flint

When I moved back into my childhood home and began excavating parts of that house I had little idea of what I would uncover. Being there was both comforting and disconcerting and the artwork I produced shows aspects of both of these responses. Materials were worn and torn, removed with both violence and care, discarded and preciousy saved. I was driven by a confusion of thoughts and feelings, including a long-standing desire to change who I was. I wasn't, in fact, who I thought I was. Biologically, I was someone else although that was only revealed well into the last year of my art-making process.





Figure 21: William Lee, *Installation View 1*, 2019. Found wallpaper, MDF, paint, video projection.



Figure 22: William Lee, *Installation View 2*, 2019. Found wallpaper, glass, video projection.

Epilogue: 2019-

*I was afraid of the basement when I was a child. It gave me a strange feeling, similar to stepping into the waters of Manitou Beach, dark and unknown. There's a wooden staircase that leads down to into the basement with an abrupt right-turn at the bottom. As I descend, the steps creak beneath my feet. The walls of the stairwell are now blank, but with some torn remnants of the wallpaper that existed there before. The basement has an unusual layout, with skinny hallways and small storage rooms that lead into a large rectangular rec room, with a long narrow bar. This is where I spent months cutting the floral pattern from the wallpaper and it is where the projects from my show now rest. I continue to use the space as my studio; the bare white walls of the stairwell are ready to be covered with something new.*

### **Bibliography**

Bloom, P. (1957) Artificial insemination (donor). *The Eugenics Review*, January 48, 205–207.